ResearchGate

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281006148

Anarchism, the State, and the Role of Education

Chapter · January 2012

CITATIONS
4

READS
563

1 author:

Justin Mueller
Northeastern University
5 PUBLICATIONS **10** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

All content following this page was uploaded by Justin Mueller on 16 August 2015.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.

Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education

Edited by Robert H. Haworth

Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education
Edited by Robert H. Haworth
© 2012 PM Press
All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978–1–60486–484–7
Library of Congress Control Number: 2011927981

Cover: John Yates / www.stealworks.com
Interior design by briandesign

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PM Press
PO Box 23912
Oakland, CA 94623
www.pmpress.org

Printed in the USA on recycled paper, by the Employee Owners of Thomson-Shore
in Dexter, Michigan.
www.thomsonshore.com

CHAPTER 1

Anarchism, the State, and the Role of Education

Justin Mueller

Education has played a particularly important role in the history of anarchist thought and practice, perhaps more so than any other political philosophy aimed at social transformation. This is in part because, for anarchists of all stripes, education has never been simply a means to achieve a new social order. It has been, rather, part of the very practice and prefiguration of the anarchist ideal of creating freer and more critical minds, and more open, cooperative and nonoppressive relationships within society. As a result, understanding the peculiar nature of the role of education for anarchism can help us better understand the relationship between anarchist educational theory and its relatives in the broader circles of "libertarian" or "radical" education. It can also help us underscore the tremendous differences between the anarchist conception of education and that of historical and contemporary statist and capitalist pedagogies. Finally, a greater understanding of the role of education within anarchist theory can help us clarify the means, aims, and ideas of the wider anarchist movement and tradition. First, however, we will briefly look at what is meant by "anarchism" and provide a basic foundation for further discussion of its values and criticisms of the existing state of education.

A Brief Sketch of Anarchism

Anarchism has had a rather bedeviled career, maligned by many, misunderstood by most, and marginalized even by erstwhile theoretical allies. In the popular imagination, it is often seen as simply synonymous with chaos, disorder, or violence; more likely to evoke the image of a smashed Starbucks window than a nuanced philosophy based upon principles of economic and

political equality (Starr, 2000). However, the anarchist Emma Goldman defined anarchism in this way:

> Anarchism, then, really stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government. Anarchism stands for a social order based on the free grouping of individuals for the purpose of producing real social wealth; an order that will guarantee to every human being free access to the earth and full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations. (1911a)

Such an idea hardly seems to warrant immediate dismissal. Rather than social disintegration, the normative principles and organizational ideas in anarchist theory advocate social, economic, and political arrangements that affirm a strong valuation of individuals as ends in themselves, a commitment to egalitarian and democratic methods, and a staunch opposition to hierarchical institutional power arrangements that subordinate some individuals to others. Fundamentally, anarchist theory operates under the notion that people can and should determine the direction of their own lives, and that social arrangements should be constructed with this aim in mind.

In answering the simple question, "What is anarchism?" it may help to begin by thinking rather of "anarchisms." The term "anarchism" really refers to a cluster of ideologies, movements and theories that share a family resemblance to each other, rather than to a largely enclosed and holistic system of thought (Guérin, 1970, p. 4) like Marxism. In this way, the wide variety of often conflicting opinions that fall under the label of "anarchism," especially regarding along what lines a future society ought to be ordered, should not be viewed as simple internal "contradictions." Rather they represent an experimental "plurality of possibilities" that may be more or less relevant or useful in a variety of different situations (de Cleyre, 2005, p. 48).

There are common principles, however, that unify anarchists. The word "anarchy" comes from the Greek, "*an*," meaning "no" or "without," and "*archos*," meaning "ruler" or "authority." In this sense, the concept does not mean "chaos" but rather an opposition to *hierarchical power relationships*, which are the corporeal embodiment of the notion of "opaque" authority (Sylvan, 1993, p. 221). Thus, opposition to the State and capitalism are appropriately features of anarchist theory, but they are *incidental* byproducts of this primary rejection of hierarchy, of divisions between those who command and those who are compelled to obey (Bookchin, 2005, p. 27). This simple principle of opposition to hierarchy and imposed authority, taken seriously, logically extends to an opposition to all dominating and exploitative social, political, and economic power relationships, including not just

capitalism and the State, but patriarchy, racism, sexism, heterosexism, war (and by extension, imperialism), and any number of other manifestations of power disparity as harmful to human development.

Anarchism is not simply a negative critique. Moving beyond the extensive list of things anarchists are opposed to, the anarchist opposition to hierarchy implies a wide variety of positive means of association. Behind any specifically proposed social arrangements, however, are a few general principles, which will be elaborated in the next sections.

Values, Human Nature, and Other Pedagogies

> Let the universal culture of schooling aim at an apprenticeship in freedom, and not in submissiveness . . . The motif, the thrust of the new age is the freedom of the will. Consequently, pedagogy ought to espouse the molding of the free personality as its starting point and objective . . . That culture, which is genuinely universal in that the humblest rub shoulders with the haughtiest, represents the true equality of all: the equality of free persons. For only freedom is equality. (Stirner, 2005, pp. 19–20)

The above quote by Max Stirner provides an excellent introduction to the anarchist attitude toward education. As Stirner suggests, the role of education in anarchist theory is one of emancipation and cultivation. Its aim is to develop free and critical minds, and in pursuit of this, cultivate the values of liberty, equality, and solidarity (Kropotkin, 1985, p. 128). We must explore what these concepts mean and how they are used for anarchists specifically. Certainly, no pedagogues from other progressive or libertarian schools of thought would deny that they too seek to develop many or all of these traits in some fashion. In order to understand what makes an anarchist approach to education distinct, then, we also need to understand the nuances in anarchist thought regarding the interplay of values, human nature, and development, as well as the relationship between individuals and society.

Values

As mentioned previously, the major values espoused by anarchists are liberty, equality, and solidarity. While different schools of anarchist thought may appear to emphasize one over the others (as with arguments between "individualist" and "social" anarchists), these differences are largely superficial, with little changed in substantive values (Guérin, 1970, p. 4). In actuality they are inseparable from and mutually inform each other. Rather than a fixed value-slope or hierarchy, these values form a continuum wherein each idea is meaningfully constituted only in association with the others.

Liberty

While distinctions can be drawn between the concepts of "freedom" and "liberty," they are essentially interchangeable in anarchist literature, and for the purposes of this essay. The anarchist conception of freedom is fundamental to understanding the entire thrust of anarchist theory. Unfortunately, it is also one of its most frequently misunderstood, caricatured or oversimplified ideas. Freedom must be understood within the context of the anarchist conception of human nature, which we will explore later. For now, it is sufficient to note that anarchists view human nature as malleable, that we have the potential to do *better*, and that freedom is a necessary condition for the development of one's potentials. Freedom for anarchists, then, goes beyond the classical liberal notions of autonomous, atomized, presocial free persons, as in the thought of Rousseau or Locke. Such liberal notions prescribe formal liberty and equality before the law, but do not provide substantively for the material security and development of individual faculties and expression (Goldman, 1940). As Daniel Guérin (1970) states, "For the anarchist, freedom is not an abstract philosophical concept, but the vital concrete possibility for every human being to bring to full development all the powers, capacities and talents with which nature has endowed him [*sic*], and turn them to social account" (p. vii).

For anarchists, freedom is not simply a lack of external fetters or domination. Nor is it, as occasionally and misleadingly imagined by critics, an "absolute" claim for simple license to do whatever one wants, regardless of wider consequences. As Errico Malatesta (1993) explains, "[Anarchism means] freedom for everybody . . . with the only limit of the equal freedom for others; which does not mean . . . that we recognise, and wish to respect, the 'freedom' to exploit, to oppress, to command, which is oppression and certainly not freedom" (p. 53).

Rather, then, freedom is conceived as part of the development of one's potential, a prerequisite for a person to "grow to his [*sic*] full stature" (Goldman, 1979, pp. 72–73). It is something that is cultivated within, rather than separate from, a given social context, and cannot be understood without reference to society. It is not a goal for a hypothetical and archetypal individual Person, but for actual people to pursue alongside and—ideally—in cooperation with others.

Equality

The importance of the notion of "equality" in anarchist thought is intimately related to anarchism's rejection of social or institutional hierarchy and domination. It is also rooted in a particular understanding of human nature. As with freedom, anarchists support social equality as a necessary condition for individuals to be able to develop their "various faculties" and their potential (Maximoff, 1953, p. 156). Mikhail Bakunin best summarizes this

intertwined appreciation for individual freedom and social equality in one of his better-remembered quotes: "Liberty without socialism is privilege, injustice; and that socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality" (ibid., p. 269). However, the anarchist critique of social inequality goes beyond simply decrying the resource deprivation endured by some and the opulence accrued to others under capitalism (or any other hierarchical social or economic order). In anarchist thought, hierarchy brutalizes and warps both those who rule and those who are ruled in a stratified system; the former in being corrupted by their relative power, and the latter by developing servile attitudes and deference to authority (Kropotkin, 1988, p. 83). Although those who are privileged in a stratified society clearly gain many benefits and seek to preserve those benefits, in anarchist theory they too are unable to develop their potential due to the degenerative effects of hierarchical power and privilege. In this way, the anarchist call for social equality is not only a rally-cry for the disenfranchised, but is also rooted in a belief that social equality is an emancipating precondition for *all* to actualize themselves fully.

Substantively, then, anarchists believe with Alexander Berkman (2003) that

> Equality does not mean an equal amount but equal opportunity. . . Do not make the mistake of identifying equality in liberty with the forced equality of the convict camp. True anarchist equality implies freedom, not quantity. It does not mean that every one must eat, drink, or wear the same things, do the same work, or live in the same manner. Far from it: the very reverse in fact . . . Individual needs and tastes differ, as appetites differ. It is equal opportunity to satisfy them that constitutes true equality. (p. 164)

As Berkman suggests, while most anarchists advocate some form of cooperative and egalitarian socioeconomic system, this is not rooted in an aesthetic valuation of "equality for equality's sake," or a conflation of equality with identical goods received. Rather, *equality of conditions and opportunity* are seen as instrumental and necessary conditions for everyone to be able to fully develop and express their individuality.

Solidarity

In opposition to the Social Darwinist advocates of his time, such as Herbert Spencer, who expounded the virtues of competition and elimination of the "unfit" elements of society (Spencer, 1993), the anarchist and scientist Peter Kropotkin argued in defense of "mutual aid" as a natural and important phenomenon in evolutionary biology and social development. In *Mutual Aid*, Kropotkin emphasizes that cooperation and fellow-feeling, not just competition and domination, have been a factor in the evolution of many

species, including humans (Kropotkin, 1972, p. 28). In this simple observation, Kropotkin sought to dispel the belief that mutual domination, competition, and destruction were somehow inevitable or even virtuous features of our social and political landscape. This challenge is representative of the core appreciation for solidarity in anarchist theory.

Solidarity, fraternity, or mutual aid are, at their simplest, cooperation and free association between individuals in a social context. In the continuum of anarchist values, it plays a vitalizing role by encouraging active empathy and identification with others. It is, at an individual level, a "moral disposition" or "attitude" toward others, wherein others are seen not as competitors to be defeated or as means to an end, but as moral equals to be respected and valued (Suissa, 2010, p. 67). In this way, solidarity functions in anarchist theory as the means of overcoming the traditional liberal dichotomy of individual liberty and social equality. While not an anarchist, Alfie Kohn (1992) expresses this understanding of solidarity well:

> When we think about co-operation . . . we tend to associate the concept with fuzzy-minded idealism. . . . This may result from confusing co-operation with altruism. . . . Structural co-operation defies the usual egoism/altruism dichotomy. It sets things up so that by helping you I am helping myself at the same time. Even if my motive initially may have been selfish, our fates now are linked. We sink or swim together. Co-operation is a shrewd and highly successful strategy—a pragmatic choice that gets things done at work and at school even more effectively than competition does. . . . There is also good evidence that co-operation is more conductive to psychological health and to liking one another. (p. 7)

In advocating solidarity, then, anarchists are not just appealing in a "utopian" fashion to the "natural goodness" of people (Wolff, 1996, p. 34), or saying that we ought to all get along and work together, in denial of potential conflict or disagreement. Rather, the anarchist belief in the value of the principle of solidarity is grounded in the understanding that even with these possibilities of divergence, organizing our relationships and society along lines of cooperation rather than competition is both possible with humans as they currently are and vital to the maintenance of the principle of "equal liberty for all." If competition overshadows cooperation, then this results in a situation of unnecessary and contrived categorization of "winners" and "losers," of "internecine strife and struggle," and consequently an unnecessary infringement upon the ability of each person to freely develop their potential (Goldman, 1979, p. 118).

Anarchists see the implementation of these freely associating cooperative organizational forms as not just immanently possible, but as an extant

and ubiquitous means of association in our day-to-day lives, in spite of contradictory norms in governing structures and the economy. Colin Ward (1973) provides a picturesque description of this perspective:

> An anarchist society, a society which organizes itself without authority, is always in existence, like a seed beneath the snow, buried under the weight of the state and its bureaucracy, capitalism and its waste, privilege and its injustices, nationalism and its suicidal loyalties, religious differences and their superstitious separatism. . . . Far from being a speculative vision of a future society, it is a description of a mode of human organization, rooted in the experience of everyday life, which operates side by side with, and in spite of, the dominant authoritarian trends of our society. (p. 18)

Human Nature

As suggested in the previous section, there is a recurring motif in critics of anarchism that suggests anarchists have an unreasonably high or even naïve opinion of human nature, and thus bases its political ideals on the "natural goodness" of people (Wolff, 1996, p. 34). While some anarchists might, it would be a mistake to consider such an understanding of human nature to be representative of the whole, or even most of anarchist thought. On the contrary, anarchist theorists have devoted considerable attention to the question of human nature, and consequently have developed a nuanced understanding of how it should be understood. It is important to understand the complexity of the anarchist conception of human nature, both in order to understand the anarchist objections to capitalism, the state, and hierarchical social authority generally, and because this complexity plays a vital role in distinguishing how anarchists approach education compared to the approaches of other "radical" or "libertarian" educators like A.S. Neill and Paulo Freire.

Anarchism and Human Nature

Rather than holding an overly positive or benign view of an "essentialist" human nature (May, 1994, p. 63), both classical and contemporary anarchist theorists have widely understood humans to be capable of violence and selfishness, as well as kindness and altruism. Human nature, for most anarchists, is neither tainted by an original sin nor a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) à la Locke. Rather, it is malleable, and certain aspects of human behavior can become more prominent depending on context. For most anarchists, it is the situations and social structures in which we find ourselves that play a significant role in determining which of these features of our "nature" will be more likely to exhibit. Contrary to the reasoning of Thomas Hobbes and, consequently, most of the modern tradition of Western political philosophy,

anarchist theorists have argued that it is precisely *because* we are capable of both good and ill that we should abolish hierarchical political institutions and social relations. As Peter Kropotkin (1988) complained:

> When we hear men saying that Anarchists imagine men much better than they really are, we merely wonder how intelligent people can repeat that nonsense. Do we not say continually that the only means of rendering men less rapacious and egotistic, less ambitious and less slavish at the same time, is to eliminate those conditions which favour the growth of egotism and rapacity, of slavishness and ambition? (p. 83)

Bakunin (1970) too believed that "It is a characteristic of privilege and of every kind of privilege to kill the mind and heart of man . . . That is a social law which admits no exceptions" (p. 31).

It is how our social relations are ordered, then, that delimits which types of behaviors are likely to thrive. One could imagine that neither Bakunin nor Kropotkin would be very surprised at the results of the Stanford Prison Experiment, wherein subjects adapted their behaviors and attitudes toward each other depending on whether they were cast as "prison guards" or "prisoners" (Zimbardo, 2007). Rather than simply hope for a deep-seated human goodness to overcome dominating and violent behavior, anarchists argue that traits like compassion, independence, and a sense of solidarity must be cultivated through properly facilitating environments. This must take place in wider society (workplace, neighborhoods, etc.) for broader changes to occur, but as Bakunin notes, the "environment that [nourishes] and [raises]" a person, like formal education in youth, is of particular importance in determining subsequent social attitudes and behavior (Maximoff, 1953, p. 153). If a child is to grow to value cooperation and solidarity with others, then she must practice cooperation rather than institutionalized competition with her peers. If a child is to grow to challenge received truths and think for herself as an adult, then she must, while young, learn in a way that encourages her to practice individual inquiry and challenge authority.

A.S. Neill and Summerhill

The original Summerhill school and its founder A.S. Neill are regularly included in accounts of broadly "libertarian" educational experiments and ideas. As one of the longest-running schools (founded in 1921 in the town of Leiston, England, and still running) this should come as no surprise (Neill, 1992, p. 8). The similarities between Summerhill and the anarchist approach to education are quite remarkable. The original intention, according to Neill was that of "[making] the school fit the child—instead of making the child fit the school" (ibid., 9). The fundamental ideals of the school are those of freedom for the child and equality among all members of Summerhill, stu-

dents and teachers alike. The freedom is that of individual autonomy. Lessons are not compulsory, play is celebrated and self-directed, and creative originality is encouraged. Equality is understood and practiced in a way that every anarchist can understand. At school-wide assembly meetings, everyone gets one vote, students and teachers alike. Teachers are called by their first names or nicknames as the social equals of students and have no real institutional authority over them (Neill, 1977, pp. 4–8). Summerhill is very much, in the words of Neill, a "self-governing community" (Neill, 1992, p. 3).

Structurally, then, Summerhill is very similar to examples and ideals of anarchist educational experiments. Pedagogically and philosophically, however, there are important distinctions. One distinction is that of Neill's understanding of human nature, which rests on the belief that a child is an innately "good, not an evil being" and that "without adult suggestion of any kind" a child can reach her potential (ibid., 9). While anarchist educators certainly don't view children as evil, and share the same abhorrence of traditional notions of "discipline" and institutional authority, they have been less enthusiastic about an individualized and abstract notion of "freedom" that does not take into account the situational and dual nature of humanity. While a child may certainly be freer and avoiding harm when protected from the regimentation and violence of traditional state schooling, such "protection from" is insufficient to provide for a positive ideal and an emancipatory social alternative. As Judith Suissa (2010) notes from her contemporary visits to Summerhill, "One has the impression of a lively group of self-confident, happy children, who may, as one imagines, very well grow up to be happy, but completely self-centred individuals . . . there is little attempt to engage with broader social issues or confront present socio-political reality" (p. 96).

A *laissez-faire* pedagogy is insufficient, then, for the anarchist approach to education. While an anarchist education does not imply any sort of dogmatic instruction, anarchist educators do view the open encouragement and practice of values, like solidarity, as a virtue. Further, and more distinctively, anarchist educators actively seek to engage with social and political questions, and to open for critique perceived repressive institutions and practices of wider society. True "neutrality" on the part of antiauthoritarian teachers in the face of an unjust and repressive social order is seen by anarchist educators as either impossible or "hypocrisy" (Ferrer, 1909, p. 6).

Desiring neither neutrality nor a dogmatic imposition of teachers' beliefs upon students, the role of an anarchist educator becomes that of a suggestive iconoclast and interlocutor with dominant social narratives. Going beyond a simple *laissez-faire* approach to learning, anarchist pedagogical practice, in seeking to encourage particular anarchist values (but not seeking to impose dogma, since this would be contrary to the values themselves) openly challenges the "sacred" institutions of the dominant

social order by desanctifying their traditional justifications (Stirner, 2005, p. 19). The act of rendering the hegemonic or the sacred questionable and open to dissection, and extending to students an invitation to this sacrilege represents anarchism's primary pedagogical distinction. That it is an open *invitation*—rather than an ideological or dogmatic disciplining of students' minds, or a passive nonengagement with broader social contexts, roles, problems, and conflicts—allows anarchism to (at least partially) resolve the problematic paradox of attempting to develop free and critical minds without extensive coercion in instruction.

Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator whose work contributed to the development of a radical philosophy of education known as "critical pedagogy." While partially rooted in the ideas of "democratic education" as expounded by John Dewey (Dewey, 1916), and the theoretical framework of the Frankfurt School (Kanpol, 1999), critical pedagogy essentially began with Freire's publishing of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire's work laid the foundation for a host of subsequent advocates and expanders of the theory and practice of critical pedagogy (Apple, 1995; Kanpol, 1999; McLaren, 1989; Shapiro, 1990; Shor, 1992). Within *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire explores the relationships between oppressors and oppressed, and the manifestation and reproduction of these relationships within teacher-student power relations. In doing so he criticizes the elitist educational theories operating in traditional educational settings, such as the "banking theory" of education, which treats knowledge as something an authority figure deposits in the minds of pupils who do (and ought to) passively receive. Critical pedagogues argue against such theories, instead positing that students are individuals with their own minds, experiences and dignity, and they must be able to take an active role in their own process of liberation in *cooperation* with critical teachers (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1989; Shor, 1992).

Along with emphasizing the dignity of students, and the need for nonoppressive teacher-student relationships, Critical pedagogy argues that critical educators must teach for social justice. For critical pedagogues, all education is necessarily political, and attempts at claiming neutrality or objectivity for education function as a de facto force for conservatism (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1987). The goal of critical pedagogy, then, is to develop an educational practice that can provide the necessary space and nonauthoritarian guidance for people to grow into their humanity, gain a critical analytical eye, and develop a compassionate and empathetic worldview that is capable of challenging the hegemonic order. This approach to education clearly shares much in common with the values of anarchist theorists. There remain, however, notable distinctions between the ideas of Freire and those of anarchist educators.

Richard Kahn poses a unique juxtaposition of the ideas of Freire and those of anarchist educator Ivan Illich. Kahn contrasts what he sees as the "promethean" attitude of Freire with the "epimethean" disposition of Illich. Prometheus represents, as in classic Greek myth, the "forethought" of planning and action. Prometheanism, Kahn argues, celebrates the "human potential for daring political deeds, technological ingenuity, and general rebellion against the powers that be to improve human life," but also represents the "industrial strivings of modernity" and "the ideology of progress" (Kahn, 2009, pp. 126–27). It is, then, a disposition toward active transformation and construction. Epimetheus, on the other hand, represents the "afterthought" to Prometheus's forethought. While Greek patriarchs viewed Epimetheus as "dull-witted" and weak, the epimetheanism of Illich offers a different interpretation, with Epimetheus representing a conservation of hope and an appreciation for what *is*, and a "convivial [relationship] with the world while the progenitor of the new world, Prometheus, remains bound and chained by his own creative deed" (ibid., pp. 127–28). Epimetheus's "afterthought" can then be interpreted not as a dull passivity, but rather as a disposition of reflection on the potentially harmful limits of transformation and appreciation for mutuality in the present (Kahn, 2010, p. 93). What is important for our understanding of this relationship, though, is that these attitudes need not be exclusive. After all, one cannot have an afterthought if there has not been a forethought.

The exchange between these two dispositions, then, provides a useful, process-oriented frame for understanding the role and method of education and pedagogy in anarchist thought, as does the distinction between Freire and the anarchists, and the ostensibly apolitical pedagogy of Neill. The anarchist approach to education is not accounted for entirely by a rigidly promethean or epimethean perspective, but is rather to be found in the experimental and dialectical tension between the two . . . much akin to the anarchist conception of a desirable and dynamic challenging and exchange between teachers and students.

Anarchy, the State, and the Classroom

Usually developing in the interstices of dominant school systems, sustained anarchist schools have had an oft-troubled history of opposition and harassment from the powers-that-be. Often seen by states (even when not by the anarchist pedagogues themselves) as direct challenges to their organizational norms, social values, and principles of authority, anarchist schools have faced bureaucratic reaction, censure, and police suppression. We will look at a few examples of anarchist schools, specifically the Modern School of Francisco Ferrer and contemporary anarchist "free" schools and space, to see some of the general principles of anarchist education in practice.

Escuela Moderna

The most prominent example of an overtly anarchist school would most likely be the Escuela Moderna (Modern School) movement that originated in Spain, as developed, operated and expounded by Francisco Ferrer. Ferrer was an anarchist and an educator, whose interest in experimental education grew alongside his disdain for the highly regimented and authoritarian school system of his home country. In the Modern School of Ferrer, children were allowed greater freedom of individual inquiry and spontaneity, time for personal reflection in the school or in the gardens surrounding, and were not treated as lesser beings to be commanded by a dogmatic authority, as in the dominant Catholic schools of Ferrer's native Spain (Goldman, 1911b). Children, thought Ferrer, ought to be able to develop the potentiality of their whole being, not simply the instrumental, vocational, or acontextually abstract, and thus were to be allowed to visit factories, museums, gardens, and other community locales in order to learn through practice (Ferrer, 1909, p. 2). Neither were they to be subjected to the nationalist messages of the state, impersonal and pedagogically inappropriate examinations, or the sexual segregation of the wider society. In his classic defense of these (still seemingly) radical practices, Ferrer (1913) declares that:

> Having admitted and practiced the coeducation of boys and girls, of rich and poor—having, that is to say, started from the principle of solidarity and equality—we are not prepared to create new inequality. Hence in the Modern School there will be no rewards and no punishments; there will be no examinations to puff up some children with the flattering title of "excellent," to give others the vulgar title of "good," and make others unhappy with a consciousness of incapacity and failure. (p. 55)

While eschewing dogma, Ferrer did not believe, like A.S. Neill, in the possibility or desirability of teaching from a stance of political or ethical neutrality. After searching in vain for textbooks he felt were appropriately nonauthoritarian for the school library, he eventually decided to install a printing press and commission works that addressed "the injustices connected with patriotism, the horrors of war, and the iniquity of conquest," things he viewed as brute facts obscured or hidden by the dogmas of the Catholic Church and the nationalism of the state (Avrich, 1980, p. 23).

Ferrer saw all of this as fitting rightly within the anarchist tradition of *prefiguration*, the development of a new society "in the shell of the old." As such, it shouldn't be a surprise that Spanish authorities reacted against this and closed down the school in 1906. What was a surprise to most, and the cause of an international outcry, was his subsequent execution resulting from bogus charges of "instigating uprising" following mass-protests and

general strikes in the wake the Spanish war against Morocco (Goldman, 1911b).

Free schools and free spaces

Informed in many ways by Ferrer, education philosopher Ivan Illich criticized the notion that a formal school is *the* proper place where education happens, arguing in defense of education as a lifelong process, rather than something that you only go through while young. Taken together, these ideas could suggest a notion of a "school" that is a socially embedded and democratic institution, freely available to all age groups, with a far more interactive and cooperative role between teachers, students and parents in designing curriculum, allocating resources, and expanding education into experiences beyond the traditional schoolhouse and occasional field trip model. Especially important was Illich's insistence that sites of education remain open to the community, rather than rigidly institutionalized, in order to avoid monopolizations of informational/knowledge channels (Illich, 1971). This notion of open and free education fits well with Paul Goodman's (1977) belief that "in anarchist theory the world revolution means the process by which the grip of authority is loosed, so that the functions of life can regulate themselves, without top-down direction and coordination" (p. 215).

This notion seems to be demonstrated in the case of some recent Anarchist Free Schools. Allan Antliff provides an inspiring account of a Toronto Anarchist Free School, and its subsequent Internet counterpart Anarchist U. These schools were/are nonprofit, voluntarily operated and open-attendance schools run along anarchist organizational lines. Within them, classes are freely proposed and freely joined by anyone interested on any number of topics. Antliff (2007) describes the different attitude of participants: "Once education was made free and grading and other assorted punitive measures (degree denial) were set aside, people could learn without competing with one another or striving to satisfy authority figures in their midst" (pp. 248–60).

Such successful, open and community-embedded experiments can provide for a cornucopia of educational diversity, and stimulate interests beyond traditional subjects, while ensuring ready, open access to knowledge for those who desire it.

Anarchist schools and educational spaces have thus emphasized the free-flowing nature of learning, and abhorred intellectual regimentation, viewing this as the death-knell of independent thought. This notion of how a school can operate certainly appears radical when compared to the operation of contemporary public schools or universities. Both of the latter are usually managed in a top-down manner with little *direct* control over the meaningful operations of the institutions by teachers, students or parents, at

least in the case of public schools. Academic departments within universities can have some degree of internal self-management, although this does not extend equally to graduate students, adjunct instructors, or other largely contingent university education workers who have little academic freedom or job security (AAUP, 2006).

The State and the Classroom

> In our dreams, people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. The present education conventions of intellectual and character education fade from their minds, and, unhampered by tradition, we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive folk.
> —John D. Rockefeller (1906)

The repression and marginalization experienced by many anarchist schools and experiments, among other obstacles, has historically made the operation of truly independent anarchist educational programs difficult. The implementation of anarchist educational and political ideals within the dominant state-run public school systems has had its own set of difficulties. The variety of critiques developed in response to this difficulty are diverse, but they are all rooted in the notion that various forms of state-run school organization, pedagogy, and practices violate the values and methods anarchists believe to be necessary to cultivate free and critical minds, and defend solidaristic and egalitarian social relations.

A principal critique from anarchist educators has been that the authority relations between students and teachers, teachers and administrators, and between schools and the state are part of a formidable hierarchy that seeks to instill and reproduce amenable attitudes toward institutional authorities and deference toward authority as such (Chomsky, 2000, p. 17). Rather than develop educational systems that gravitate around the needs of the individual child, children are molded to the goals and expectations of the state educational system. In a capitalist system, this manifests as publicly funded "apprentice-training for corporations, government" and the reproduction of the educational system itself, as well as "adjusting" students to their problems with authority (Goodman, 1964, p. 18). For Goodman, the bell-ringing, time-accounting, and hierarchical authority and disciplinary system of state schools function as a form of behavioral operant conditioning, developing obedience rather than spontaneity or initiative.

Voltairine de Cleyre, an American anarchist and teacher, criticized the school systems at the end of the nineteenth century for their authoritarian operations and the effects they had upon their unfortunate students. She decried how children were forced to sit silently and absolutely still for hours on end, while being "taught" material that had little relevance to their own

lives and interests and usually sought to expound the virtues of the dominant political order through the guise of a benign claim to "truth." The effect of this, she noted, was to put "an iron mould upon the will of youth, destroying all spontaneity and freedom of expression" (de Cleyre, 2005, p. 260). Her most effective description of the absurdity of this system is encapsulated in a poignant, if lengthy (as was her style), metaphor:

> Any gardener who should attempt to raise healthy, beautiful, and fruitful plants by outraging all those plants' instinctive wants and searchings, would meet as his reward—sickly plants, ugly plants, sterile plants, dead plants. He will not do it; he will watch very carefully to see whether they like much sunlight, or considerable shade, whether they thrive on much water or get drowned in it . . . the plant itself indicate to him when he is doing the right thing . . . If he finds the plant revolts against his experiments, he will desist at once, and try something else; if he finds it thrives, he will emphasize the particular treatment so long as it seems beneficial. But what he will surely not do, will be to prepare a certain area of ground all just alike, with equal chances of sun and amount of moisture in every part, and then plant everything together without discrimination—mighty close together!—saying beforehand, "If plants don't want to thrive on this, they ought to want to; and if they are stubborn about it, they must be made to." (ibid., p. 255)

Anarchist educators would agree, then, with critical pedagogues in the judgment that the implementation of standardized testing regimes, a cornerstone of current policies like No Child Left Behind, renders pedagogical experimentation and potential challenges to this arrangement very difficult, even when a cantankerous or brave educator (anarchist or otherwise) does have the desire. Standardized tests are seen, in Fordist fashion, as imposing uniform performance expectations and methods upon students who have different learning styles, individual needs, and who may be at different places in their personal intellectual development. Further, rather than encouraging a curriculum oriented toward the development of critical analytical skills, or fulfilling personal curiosity, standardized tests encourage a shallow, bulimic approach to learning. This entails the rote consumption and regurgitation of contextually isolated facts and figures on command, with high performance on a test seen as an end in itself, and synonymous with having learned something. On top of it all, standardized tests serve as gatekeepers of educational advancement, threatening failure and halting further learning until "adequacy" is demonstrated (Kohn, 2000).

In the face of this sort of "education," some radical pedagogues have looked for inspirational educational alternatives in the ancient Athenian educational system and principles of paideia (Morrison, 1995; Fotopoulos,

2005; Shiva, 2005). The value of this system does have limits, given, among other things, the political limitations and prejudices of ancient Athens (Kahn, 2010, p. 38). However, in comparing broadly libertarian educational principles to the broad, civic-minded self-improvement goals of the ancient Athenian educational system of paideia we can find a useful epochal counterpart to relate to the modern state. The correlate "ideal" educational system of the modern state can, then, be understood as a combination of disciplinary market instrumentalism and agoge, the ancient Spartan disciplinary regimen. In the agoge regimen, youth (solely males then) were trained to value loyalty to the State over the self, military discipline, conformity, and competition among peers for the purposes of establishing dominance (Hodkinson, 1996). In creating more space within the modern educational system for alternatives to this disciplinarian and regimented pedagogy, alternatives like paideia or other models of inspiration, could certainly provide a welcome reprieve, and protect pockets of "spheres of free action," even if they are ephemeral (Ward, 1973, p. 18).

In comparing the structures and functional values of state schools in the United States with previous examples of anarchist schooling, and after elaborating on the values, organizational principles and understanding of human nature within anarchist thought, I hope that the differences in values instilled and desirable types of persons developed are made starkly apparent. Many of the critiques of state school systems offered by anarchist educators are over a century old, yet (unfortunately) sound incredibly contemporary.

Conclusions

Ultimately, I hope to have demonstrated that understanding the relationship between anarchism and education is a worthwhile project. While sharing many commonalities with other radical traditions, I believe that anarchist theory provides an identifiably distinct perspective for understanding and approaching education as a political, prefigurative, and transformative encounter, regardless of one's politics. I hope to have also demonstrated the importance of education for anarchism as a political theory and emancipatory personal and social project. The implications of this appreciation for education and the importance of early prefigurative value-contestation and construction are two-fold, however. Gustav Landauer best summarized this conceptual problematic in this way: "The state is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behavior; we destroy it by contracting other behavior, by behaving differently" (Ward, 1973, p. 23).

Understanding oppressive institutions as not "things" to be destroyed, but relationships to remake and ideas to replace is a double-edged sword. It is frustrating in that it disperses the sites of critical social contestation

against oppressive institutions and ideas to, literally, the minds of every individual (though this does not preclude traditional externalized social struggles for greater equity and liberty). It is encouraging, though, in that it reveals their nonmonolithic and mutable nature. Taking advantage of an anarchist approach to education, then, could, in terms of pedagogy and praxis, open up greater possibilities for imagining and cultivating alternative social relationships in the minds of those who would live them.

References

AAUP. (2006). *American Association of University Professors Contingent Faculty Index 2006*. Retrieved from http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/research/conind2006.htm.

Antliff, A. (2007). Breaking free: Anarchist pedagogy. In M. Cote, R. Day & G. de Peuter (Eds.), *Utopian pedagogy*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Apple, M. (1995). *Democratic schools*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Avrich, P. (1980). *The modern school movement*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bakunin, M. (1970). *God and the state*. New York: Dover.

Berkman, A. (2003). *What is anarchism?* Edinburgh/London/Oakland: AK Press.

Bookchin, M. (2005). *The ecology of freedom: The emergence and dissolution of hierarchy.* Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press.

Chomsky, N. (2000). *Chomsky on miseducation*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

de Cleyre, V. (2005). Modern educational reform. In *Exquisite rebel: The essays of Voltairine de Cleyre*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: The Free Press.

Ferrer, F. (1909). *The modern school*. New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association.

Ferrer, F. (1913). *The origins and ideals of the modern school*. London: Watts.

Fotopoulos, T. (2005). From (mis)education to Paideia. *International Journal of Inclusive Democracy, 55*(1) (September).

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Goldman, E. (1911a). Anarchism: What it really stands for. In *Anarchism and other essays*. New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association.

Goldman, E. (1911b). Francisco Ferrer and the modern school. In *Anarchism and other essays*. New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association.

Goldman, E. (1940). *The place of the individual in society*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Goldman, E. (1979). *Red Emma speaks*, A.K. Shulman (Ed.). London: Wildwood House.

Goodman, P. (1964). *Compulsory mis-education*. New York: Vintage Books.

Guérin, D. (1970). *Anarchism: From theory to practice*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Hodkinson, S. (1996). Agoge. In S. Hornblower (Ed.), *Oxford classical dictionary.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kahn, R. (2009). Anarchic epimetheanism: The pedagogy of Ivan Illich. In R. Amster, A. DeLeon, L. Fernandez, A. Nocella II & D Shannon (Eds.), *Contemporary anarchist studies: An introductory anthology of anarchy in the academy*. London, UK: Routledge.

Kahn, R. (2010). *Critical pedagogy, ecoliteracy, and planetary crisis.* New York: Peter Lang.

Kanpol, B. (1999). *Critical pedagogy: An introduction*, 2nd ed. Westport, Conn.: Bergan & Garvey.

Kohn, A. (1992). *No contest: The case against competition.* New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Kohn, A. (2000). *The case against standardized testing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
Kropotkin, P. (1972). *Mutual aid: A factor of evolution.* London: Allen Lane.
Kropotkin, P. (1985). *The conquest of bread.* Catania: Elephant Editions.
Kropotkin, P. (1988). *Act for yourselves: Articles from Freedom 1886–1907*, N. Walter & H. Becker (Eds.). London: Freedom Press.
Malatesta, E. (1993). *Errico Malatesta: His life and ideas*, 3rd ed., V. Richards (Ed.). London: Freedom Press.
Marshall, P. (2010). *Demanding the impossible: A history of anarchism*. Oakland: PM Press.
Maximoff, G.P. (Ed.). (1953). *The political philosophy of Bakunin.* New York: The Free Press.
May, T. (1994). *The political philosophy of poststructuralist anarchism*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press.
McLaren, P. (1989). *Life in schools*. New York: Longman.
Morrison, R. (1995). *Ecological democracy*. Boston: South End Press.
Neill, A.S. (1977). *Summerhill: A radical approach to child rearing*. New York: Pocket Books.
Neill, A.S. (1992). *Summerhill school: A new view of childhood*. A. Lamb, (Ed.). New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
Shapiro, S. (1990). *Between capitalism and democracy*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
Shiva, V. (2005). *Earth democracy: Justice, sustainability, and peace*. Boston: South End Press.
Shor, I. (1987). *Critical teaching and everyday life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Shor, I. (1992). *Empowering education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Spencer, H. (1993). *Spencer: Political writings.* J. Offer, (Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Starr, A. (2000). *Naming the enemy: Anti-corporate movements confront globalization*. New York: Zed Books.
Stirner, M. (2005). False principles of our education. In D. Guérin (Ed.), *No gods, no masters*. Oakland: AK Press.
Suissa, J. (2010). *Anarchism and education: A philosophical perspective*. Oakland: PM Press.
Sylvan, R. (1993). Anarchism. In R.E. Goodin & P. Pettit (Eds.), *A companion to contemporary political philosophy.* Oxford: Blackwell.
Ward, C. (1973). *Anarchy in action*. London: Freedom Press.
Wolff, J. (1996). *An introduction to political philosophy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Zimbardo, P. (2007). *The Lucifer effect: Understanding how good people turn evil*. New York: Random House.

View publication stats